



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

Architecture for the sustainability design
Architecture for Restoration and Enhancement of Heritage
Architecture construction city

This thesis proposes a reinterpretation of the historical city of Suzhou through a project theme. An area recently demolished within the walls offers the opportunity to consider the current transformations in the notion of architectural historical heritage. The proposal for a new urban mix that meets the needs of the current inhabitants and potential visitors is also an opportunity to test the foundational concepts of Suzhou's historic gardens, now a UNESCO heritage site and a destination for millions of visitors.

Reinterpreting the Past.

An integrated approach to urban transformation in historical Suzhou.

Rehabilitating the ancient city.

An urban block as a journey into memory.

A new form of accommodation.

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Reinterpreting the Past.



Suzhou is one of the most visited tourist destinations in China, thanks to its well-preserved old town surrounded by canals and the unique urban landscape. The city is also well-known for the magnificent Chinese gardens, most of which are enlisted as UNESCO World Heritage sites as the essence and the traditions of Chinese culture.

The thesis work studied initially the main concepts of the Chinese gardens and the current dynamics of urban transformation related with the old town. A new form of urbanization is then proposed that reinterprets historical Suzhou; the masterplan proposes a new urban mixite taking into account the historical context and seeking how to supply the current inhabitants and visitors necessities.

Rehabilitating the ancient city.

China population has been growing recklessly, the urbanization process has been accelerating and demanding a faster development of dwellings. Currently, the most spread forms of housing in the cities are not associated with the Chinese traditional housing forms, such as courtyard houses that, on the contrary, began to disappear also in historic contexts.

Approaching to Suzhou, a city where the oldtown has been displaced in many aspects by modern developments, facilities or services established in the periphery. We see a constant clash between the old and the new city. However, to protect the rural area since 1995 the space for urban development in the city has been restricted, producing the necessity of returning to inhabit the old town where the majority of houses are historical.

One of the main built features are courtyards that the Chinese philosophy as found in the Chinese gardens and traditional houses. Courtyards have a cultural value besides offer a persistent connection with the nature.

Hence the design proposal aims at understanding courtyards houses also identifying their main concepts that will be the starting point for the development of the new residences located in the Xijie and Changmen neighbourhoods inside the oldtown of Suzhou.

The project proposes a new form of inhabiting the old town, derived from the reinterpretation of the traditional courtyard houses respecting the Chinese culture and traditions, but at the same time answering to nowadays fast-urban development. Improving living conditions and supplying what is needed to the actual urban population, in line with Chinese housing standard, is promoted as a more sustainable development.



A model for restoration of the heritage.

In recent years, tourism in China has sparked a concern for the preservation of heritage. However, the regulations implemented to protect the architectural heritage were born under the model of a Western vision. As a consequence, these regulations lack of adequate protection for the many valuable historical and cultural small spaces, as well as the defence of intangible heritage, one of the most important elements in Chinese culture.

This thesis will focus on the strategic restoration of one of these small places in the old Suzhou that englobes several Chinese historical periods. Therefore, this research pursues to be a reference of future urban renewal plans in the old Suzhou.

The proposal seeks to achieve the restoration of the areas adjacent to the Five Peaks Garden, the rehabilitation of an old abandoned house and the revaluation of the neighbourhood through the introduction of new cultural functions.

In this way, it is important to understand what heritage really matters in the Chinese context. For this purpose, it was necessary to approach the basis of the regulations for protection and enhancing of heritage in China.

Thanks to the interpretation of the traditional elements and the creation of exciting areas like the Chinese gardens, it is possible to give back life to an abandoned historic building and raise the status of the garden within the block. It is proposed as a form of evocation and active conservation of the memory of the past.



A new form of accommodation.

In this thesis, through the researches of the urban structure, architectural style and garden's space in combination with the analysis of the current situation of tourism in Suzhou, I made a proposal of an alternative form of a hotel that incorporates modern architecture to interpret the genius loci of Suzhou. While collecting the necessary information for my survey, I used traditional field research to analyse the characteristics of local architecture, the atmosphere, and spatial composition.

I adopted the "Mat-building strategy" defined by Alison Smithson to establish an architectural framework using the traditional building scale. The internal space of the hotel will be filled by reinterpretation of the spatial composition and the atmosphere of Suzhou gardens. In this way, I obtained a two-story building that uses the local architectural scale as its bone, enriched by the feeling of the garden, the poetic life, and the local spirit of Suzhou and by the use of modern materials and techniques.

This new-style hotel building connects traditional and modern features, as well as connecting visitors' experiences to the surrounding context. I hope that through the new

form, visitors can enjoy “slow traveling,” experience the true Suzhou lifestyle, and the real feeling of “living the garden”.

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